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ABSTRACT

This publication reflects the philosophy and support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation for early childhood care and development. It highlights different approaches to early childhood care and development and explains why the foundation believes that investing in early childhood is one of the best ways of building a brighter, better future. The publication seeks to assist policy makers and program planners in their search for realistic, effective, and affordable ways to enhance early childhood care and development. The various approaches to early childhood interventions included in this document are run by a variety of partner organizations in the countries concerned: local and national governments, nongovernmental organizations, universities, and community agencies. They are given as examples of programs that build on local culture and local realities. Eight chapters cover the following topics: (1) why children matter; (2) the importance of the early years; (3) why parents are important; (4) involving parents; (5) involving the community; (6) benefits of early childhood interventions; (7) quality and cost; and (8) developing an agenda for action. Fourteen examples included as sidebars in the chapters profile efforts of several countries or address special topics. Contains 37 references. (TJQ)

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Why children matter

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Bernard van Leer Foundation

Why children matter

investing in early childhood care and development

199

Bernard van Leer Foundation

About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private institution based in The Netherlands. It was created in 1949 for broad humanitarian purposes and now concentrates its resources on support for early childhood care and development.

The Foundation takes its name from Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist who died in 1958 and gave the entire share capital of his worldwide enterprise for humanitarian purposes. The Foundation's income is derived from this enterprise – Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer – which is established in over 35 countries and whose core business is the manufacture of packaging products.

The Foundation's central objective is to improve opportunities for children up to the age of eight years who are living in disadvantaged circumstances. Two main strategies are used to achieve this objective:

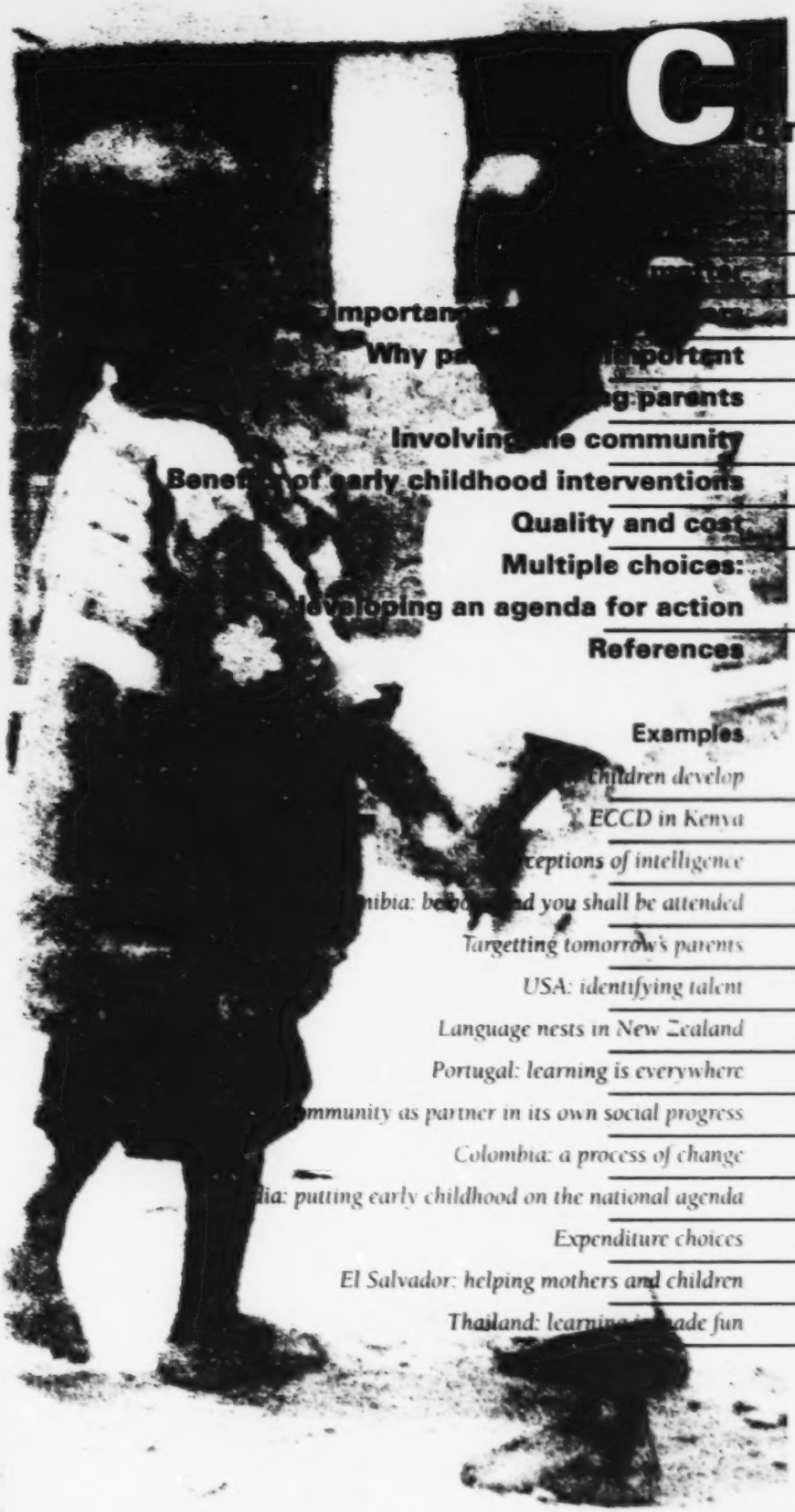
- supporting the development of innovative field-based approaches in early childhood care and development; and
- sharing relevant experience with as wide an audience as possible in order to influence policy and practice.

This means that the Foundation both supports projects in the field and advocates for policies and practices that will create improved conditions for children. The Foundation's philosophy and activities are embedded in real life rather than in theory, they stem from the experience gained from supporting hundreds of projects around the world.

The Foundation does not run any field-based projects itself. Instead, it offers support to organisations in the different countries. These organisations include government departments, local municipalities, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations. These local partners are responsible for all aspects of a project – development, management, training, implementation, evaluation. They also contribute a proportion of the costs in terms of both money and services. The projects focus on those children from birth to eight years of age who are least able to benefit from educational and developmental opportunities because of social and other forms of disadvantage.

The Foundation has just one office in The Netherlands, where a staff of 50 people are based. There are no other Foundation offices, nor are any Foundation employees based in the field.

In accordance with its statutes, the Foundation gives preference in project support to countries in which Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer is established. At any one time, around 120 projects are being supported by the Foundation in approximately 45 countries around the world. These include industrialised as well as developing countries.



Contents

	5
	6
Importan	8
Why pa	portant 10
g parents	12
Involving e community	16
Benef of early childhood interventions	20
Quality and cost	24
Multiple choices:	
loping an agenda for action	28
References	30

Examples

children develop	6
ECCD in Kenya	8
ceptions of intelligence	10
nibia: be d you shall be attended	12
Targetting tomorrow's parents	14
USA: identifying talent	16
Language nests in New Zealand	18
Portugal: learning is everywhere	20
mmunity as partner in its own social progress	22
Colombia: a process of change	24
ia: putting early childhood on the national agenda	26
Expenditure choices	27
El Salvador: helping mothers and children	28
Thailand: learnin ade fun	32

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The examples and photographs used in this publication, unless otherwise indicated, are drawn from the experience of the many people involved in projects supported by the Foundation.

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Preface

Children are at their most vulnerable when they are very young. The first few years of life are the time that infants most need our love, our care and our attention. These are also the years when we can influence them most. During the early years they develop rapidly – physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually – and if we do not give them the attention they need, they will fail to flourish and will have problems in later years.

It is through the next generation that a society transmits its values, its culture and its traditions and thus ensures its continued existence. The values, attitudes and characteristics that a child acquires during its first years will last throughout life.

These are among the many reasons why the Bernard van Leer Foundation concentrates its resources on early childhood care and development. The Foundation believes that in order to improve opportunities for young children, it is necessary to work with the people who surround them and who can have an influence on their lives. This includes parents, siblings, other family members, communities, organisations that provide services, local and national governments and international institutions.

The Foundation encourages approaches that:

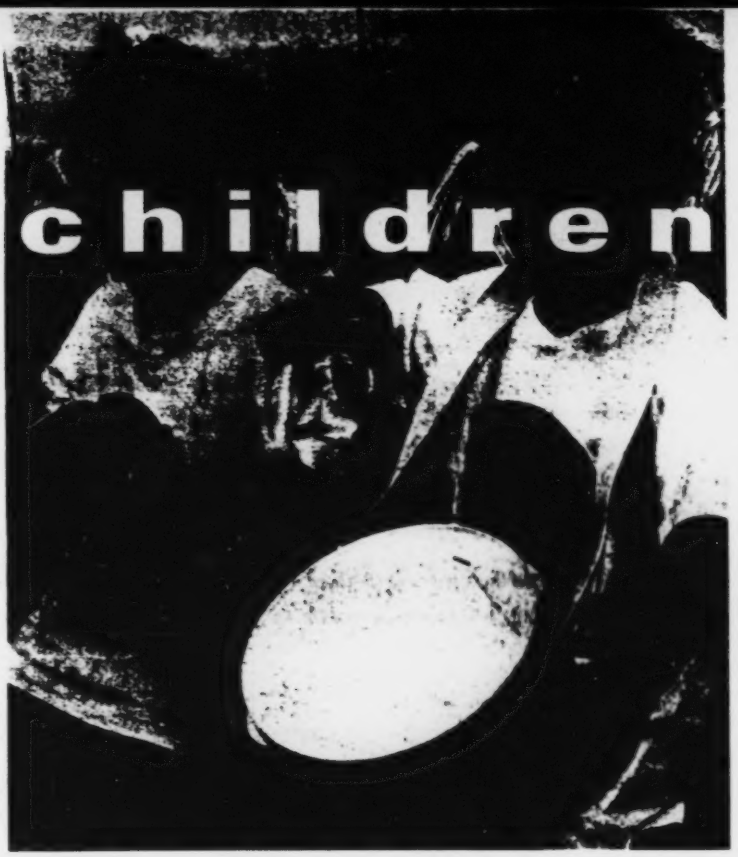
- adopt a holistic approach to children's development and look at all aspects of a child's life;
- emphasise the special role that parents have as a child's first educators; and
- mobilise community support and build on community strengths in efforts to improve children's environments and to make use of local, affordable and sustainable resources.

This publication [illegible] of these approaches and exp[illegible] the Foundation believes that investing [illegible] childhood care and development is [illegible] best ways of building a brighter, [illegible]. The Foundation hopes that this publication will help policy makers and programme planners in their search for realistic, effective and affordable ways to enhance early childhood care and development.

The various approaches to early childhood interventions that are included here are run by a variety of partner organisations in the countries concerned: governments (national and local), non-governmental organisations, universities, community agencies. The approaches are given as examples, none of them are suggested as being 'right' or 'best'. They all build on local culture and local realities. Whether the experience described is from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America or North America, there are many lessons that can be applied elsewhere.

A key lesson or message that emerges everywhere is that there is an increasing urgency to act to improve opportunities for young children. More and more evidence mounts daily about the tragic consequences of not providing adequate care and attention to children. Equally, there has never before been a time when so much is known about what children need to be able to develop successfully and when so much experience demonstrates that investing in early childhood care and development is effective today and for the future.

Why children



How children develop *If learning begins at birth, child development begins at conception. Good maternal health and nutrition is the first basic need for healthy development. From birth, babies can see, hear, taste, smell, feel pain and touch. They display a wide range of emotional expressions – joy, anger, fear, surprise, sadness and interest – from as early as one month of age in reaction to external events. Infants actively communicate with others from the very beginning. Although development continues throughout life, the development that takes place in the first months and years is the most fundamental, and the most rapid, that occurs throughout our lives. What happens at one stage affects what happens in the future, either positively or negatively.*

Child development occurs through interaction with people and things. Children are affected by and affect their surroundings. Child development follows certain patterns, but the development of an individual child is a unique experience.

During the first year, infants master a whole range of motor skills. Awareness of the

Children represent the future. Investing in children and their healthy development has benefits for society as a whole, for parents and families and, of course, for the children themselves.

Today's changing world has led to pressures that affect children's development. Increased urbanisation, changing patterns of employment, and mass migration of peoples within and across national borders have all led to profound social changes in most countries. Traditional family structures are breaking down as a result, often leaving women as the head of households with a dual responsibility: having to bring up their children without much support, and having to earn the money to provide for basic necessities. All of this is set against a backdrop of global economic recession that places an additional burden on parents and children already coping with disadvantage.

As individual families and communities search for creative and effective approaches to provide the care and attention their children need, there are increasing pressures on governments to introduce measures that will support these efforts. Economic constraints mean that all concerned are looking for value for money. According to UNICEF, investing in early childhood programmes is one way of having impact on a wide range of social issues: 'early childhood is a time of opportunity in which even small positive changes can generate long-term benefits'.[1]

Those benefits include:

- a healthier population that is better educated, better trained, more able to obtain and keep productive employment;
- less 'wastage' such as repetition and drop-out in the school system;

matter

- lower delinquency rates;
- and, ultimately, lower expenditure on welfare and social services.

The primary responsibility for children's development lies with their parents and immediate family members. Parents are a child's first educators, first caregivers. Therefore any activities that aim to enhance early childhood care and development must start by supporting parents and building upon the efforts they make with their children.

Similarly, communities play a crucial role in the development of the next generation. Activities that are rooted in the community and grow up from a base that is culturally, socially and economically appropriate will result in far-reaching benefits for the children and the communities. When community members are motivated to tackle their own problems, they find solutions that enhance their own feeling of self-worth and they are motivated to take on new tasks.

Increasingly, the international community is recognising the value of investing in early childhood care and development (ECCD). The basic human right of children to survive and develop is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in 1989. In September 1990, UNICEF convened a World Summit for Children which established a plan of action to protect children through the implementation of those and other rights.[2]

A key aspect of children's development is the right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity. The global community reaffirmed this right in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand. The need to provide 'basic education' to all children, youth and adults was highlighted. So too, was the recognition that learning begins at birth and that there was a need to expand programmes for early childhood care and development.[3]

movements that their bodies produce leads to understanding of cause and effect. They learn simple concepts and then use these to acquire and understand more complex ideas during the first two years. Babies are naturally curious and, in a supportive, sensitive and responsive environment in which they feel secure, they flourish. Through interactions with people, they begin to communicate verbally. By about the age of three, their language skills improve rapidly. Socially, children become aware of themselves as individuals and of the people around them and their relationships and roles. They are able to understand and display emotion. They have a reasonable knowledge and understanding of their immediate environment and learn to imitate the behaviour of others.

Child development is multidimensional, integral and occurs continually. It involves physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions. These dimensions are inter-related: change in one both influences and is influenced by change in the others.

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The importance o

ECCD in Kenya *Early childhood care and development has been a component of government policy in Kenya since independence in 1963. As part of the national effort of self-help (harambee), pre-schools were planned and set up by local communities. The expansion of pre-schools in the first decades following independence was not matched by the quality of services and experiences for the children. In the 1970s a National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) was set up to improve the training of people working in the pre-schools and to upgrade the quality of the pre-schools. A network of District Centres for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) supports these activities in the districts. Through a series of courses, trainers and teachers learn to:*

- *appreciate the importance of learning and play materials in the development of young children;*
- *design and use materials to stimulate various aspects of child growth and development;*
- *detect any children with special needs and take appropriate action to assist them; and*
- *take a lead in raising awareness among parents and the community about the need to stimulate children's development.*

Over the years, involvement of the parents and communities has increased and broadened. From initial instances where parents and communities constructed pre-school facilities and paid for the staff.

'I think it is time to come out boldly to insist that children should be placed at the centre stage in all development thinking.'
Muhammad Yunus, Founder and President of the Grameen Bank, Bangladesh
UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 1993, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 15

A child's first years are vitally important. During this time, a child's expectations and attitudes are formed. Physical growth is rapid and the growth of the brain during the first two years of life is unmatched by any other developments that occur during the life span. Within the first three years, infants learn the basics of human behaviour. By the age of three, a child's character and personality are formed – not yet immutably, but almost so. Many of the social and moral values that will guide them through the rest of their lives have been transmitted.

Children are active learners. They construct their own knowledge and understanding of the world through repeated interactions with people and with materials in their environment. The more stimulating their environment and the more opportunities they have to explore, to question, to experiment, to play and to symbolise, the better prepared they are for later life.

In addition to proper nutrition, physical health care and hygiene, a child needs an intimate interactive relationship with one or more caregivers who can guide her or him to participate in the shared system of skills, knowledge, needs and values which constitutes a culture. Unless these psycho-social needs are catered for, the consequence may be an increasing number of children, youths and adults incapable of participation in the social order of a society, or who feel no need for it.[4] When children receive too little attention, they believe that what they do does not matter and they soon stop trying.

Research into early childhood development shows the need to value young children and interact with them in 'real' ways – person to person, in the context of meaningful activities.[5] Approaches being tried in Kenya (see left) have recognised the importance of building links between learning that takes place outside the

f the early years

home and learning that can take place in the home. The value of strengthening the ability of parents to provide learning and development stimulation for their children in a holistic manner has been recognised. This example also highlights the role of play in helping children develop and focuses on an approach to development that allows for an unfolding of children's potential, an opportunity for children to learn by discovery rather than by the imposition of knowledge. The importance of appropriate training approaches for parents and early childhood workers is also highlighted. Training often focuses on the transmission of knowledge. More important is the need to put across a methodology or the understanding of the developmental benefits of different activities.

According to Stephen Ngaruiya, a lecturer in curriculum education at the National Centre for Early Childhood Education in Kenya, some universalities exist in early childhood development, no matter what the cultural background. One of these is learning by participating and from experiences. At a simple level, something like toy making with parents and children and the use of toys in helping children to develop can be used almost anywhere in the world, but the local culture determines what is made, how it is made and how it is used, says Mr Ngaruiya. 'Given the right opportunities and the right learning environment, children will develop in similar ways whatever their background. Culture may affect, and sometimes even determine, the topics, methodologies and techniques we use, but there is an underlying universality. As long as we always keep in mind that everything we do is concerned with the development of the whole child, we are all doing the same sorts of things for the same sorts of reasons.'[6]

they now participate in the production of materials. For example, in curriculum development, a participatory approach is used whereby trainers, parents and local communities are involved. Trainers meet parents and community members individually or in groups to collect folklore materials (stories, riddles, poems, games, plays) which are later edited and reproduced. This methodology has encouraged the tapping of available human and physical resources and enhanced the development of confidence and a sense of achievement and satisfaction in the parents and local communities because they feel that they have contributed to their children's learning. Even older children are becoming involved. In all the DICECEs, workshops are held to encourage primary school children to make toys and learning materials and then to play with them with the younger children. The ensuing child-to-child interaction is beneficial for both the older and younger children. In a further development, some pre-schools are now being used as a base for outreach activities with families of children who do not attend because of their age or other reasons. Particular attention is paid to health and nutrition issues as well as ways in which parents and other family members can enhance the development of young children.

Sources ECCD in Kenya: *extracted from A case study of district centres for early childhood education in Kenya by Anne W Nyenga, KIE, Nairobi. Paper prepared for the South and East African Seminar on 'Collaborating for Educational Change in non-formal Basic Education' organised by the International Institute for Educational Planning in January 1992; and from the papers by Anne Nyenga and Elizabeth Kamau, presented at the International Seminar on Child-to-Child and the Growth and Development of Young Children, in Kenya in 1989, reported in* Carnegie, R. and Hawes, H. (eds), **Child-to-child and the Growth and Development of Young Children** London, Child-to-Child Trust, 1990

Why parents are

Perceptions of intelligence *Definitions of what comprises intelligence can vary considerably across cultures. For example, a recent review reveals that small-scale agricultural African communities identify cooperation as a key aspect of intelligence. In the Ivory Coast, intelligent children are those who exhibit a 'readiness to carry out tasks in the service of the family and the community'; in rural areas in Ghana, intelligence was associated with being friendly, happy and honourable.*

In the USA, studies have also found different theories of intelligence among different groups: Filipino and Vietnamese parents defined intelligence as working hard to achieve goals; for Hispanic parents, to be social was an important part of being intelligent; while, by contrast, Anglo-American parents gave more weight to cognitive abilities. Each of these conceptions, stored in the cultural 'tool kit', will be associated with parents' behaviour towards children in

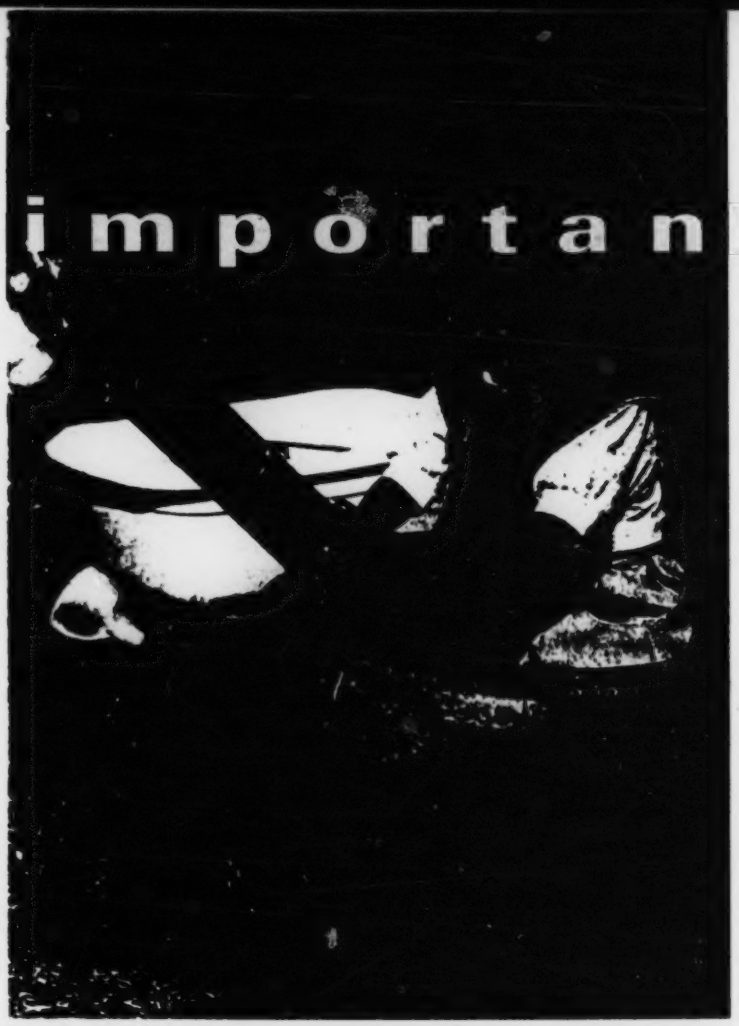
We do not have to rely only on our instincts to know that parents are important for their children's future: there is a wide body of evidence that points to the beliefs and behaviour of parents as mediators who have a fundamental influence on their children's developmental opportunities.

Children who are disadvantaged live in environments that limit their developmental opportunities because of lack of resources, discrimination, violence and other reasons. Parents and caregivers of young children can mediate the effects of poor environments and can diminish some of the negative influences.

The mediating role of parents is exercised through both parental beliefs and parental behaviour towards children. Beliefs about what children should or should not be are part of a cultural 'tool kit' which parents draw on to respond to specific situations. Children crying, asking questions, children who have lost their appetites, children who are sick, or are doing well or badly in school, are everyday life situations which need specific responses from parents. Responses to children's school performance, for example, is related to parents' conceptions of intelligence (see left).

Research has identified some specific variables related to parental behaviour. For example, there is convincing evidence of a higher incidence of psychological distress among people suffering from economic hardship which is correlated to caregivers' coercive behaviour towards children.

'The inattention to children by our society poses a greater threat to our safety, harmony and productivity than any external enemy.'
Marian Wright Edelman, President, Children's Defense Fund.
UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 1991, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 31



relation to school performance and will set the parameters for what is right or wrong, good or bad, proper or improper. These differing views lead to varying attitudes towards children's learning, to teaching methods and to types of instruction, and they ultimately have an impact on children's education. For example, one study found that Anglo-American mothers did not see themselves as teachers and expected schools to take the responsibility for teaching. In contrast, Mexican-American mothers accepted responsibility for teaching and preparing their children for school.

and lack of attention and emotional support.[8] As an effect of economic hardship, women with children have to develop survival strategies such as generating additional income and cutbacks in expenditures related to their personal well-being. Mothers' irritability, conflicts with partners, and discussions of financial problems with their children are observed behaviour with negative effects on children's development.[9] The burden of poverty or other disadvantages on children may be increased by the deterioration of the marital bond, single parenthood and lack of a support network for single parents which may result in greater levels of anxiety and depression[10] for women.

There is also evidence[11] of how parental behaviour can make a difference in situations of cultural conflict where children have to adjust to a host culture. Parents who encourage and reinforce their own culture and traditions in their children will also assist them to relate more effectively to a new culture. Biculturalism may benefit children's performance in that it enables them to function successfully in more than one context.

Sources *Perceptions of intelligence:* *Okagaki, L. & Sternberg, R., 'Parental beliefs and children's school performance' in* **Child Development**, Vol. 64, 1993, pp. 33-56. Coll, C.T.G., 'Developmental outcome of minority infants: a process-oriented look into our beginnings' in **Child Development**, Vol. 61, 1990, pp. 270-289

Involving paren

Namibia: Be born and you shall be attended *The education of a Ju/'hoan begins at birth with a simultaneous intensity, ease and sweetness. From her first moments, baby Khoba was welcomed into a partnership with a society and a mother whose presence, attention and care focused on her baby's needs. The first few days, Khoba could be found nestled next to her mother's body, near her breast, the warm hollow of her arm, or just against her back. Older children and adults came to see, to welcome this tiny new Ju/'hoan. By the end of her first week, Khoba could be found near the breast of various grandmothers. By the end of her second week, she came on old =Atsa's breast and sat with us at our school. I have never heard her cry ... she seemed enveloped in a cocoon, a halo, of warmth and responsiveness. It would seem that a baby's first lesson is 'cry and you shall be heard' ... or perhaps, even deeper and more basic, 'be born and you shall be attended'. For her needs seemed known and responded to often before she voiced them herself.*

Source Namibia: Be born and you shall be attended: *from an informal progress report by Melissa Heckler, Early Childhood Educator, Namibia*
Reproduced by kind permission of the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation

Because parental attitudes and behaviour are so important, the challenge for policy makers and programme planners is to find ways to enhance the quality of the interactions that affect children in the very early years. This means a focus on the home and on parents, building on and strengthening the natural routines and practices that have evolved over the years. In Namibia, for example, a warm welcome awaits a new baby (see left) to ensure that she is made to feel safe, secure and loved. Parents, other family members and friends from the community are all interested in the new child and want to play a part in her development.

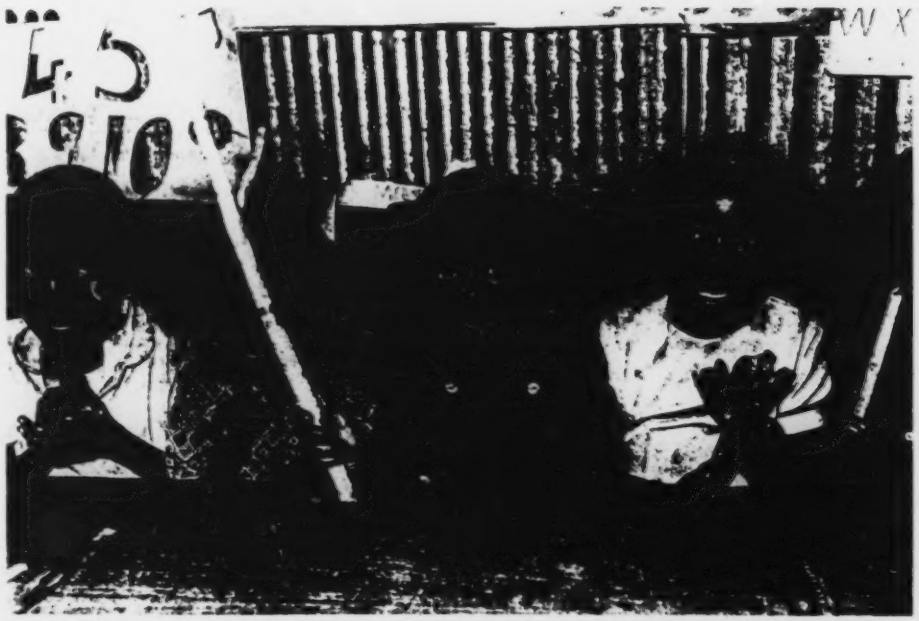
One approach that is increasingly being taken is targetting children and adolescents before they become parents. Child-to-Child activities build on traditional ways in which children have always helped one another and contributed to spreading ideas. Current approaches seek to empower children with new knowledge, to protect their rights, and also emphasise their responsibilities. Millions of children around the world are now involved in Child-to-Child activities, spreading health messages and good health practices to other children, their families, and their communities. An increasing number of Child-to-Child programmes are incorporating child development

messages in their work, thus influencing present and future generations.

Targetting teenagers can have a number of effects both now and in the future. By helping adolescents understand how their own bodies work, and the responsibilities of parenthood, unwanted teenage pregnancies can be reduced (see page 14). At the same time, the teenagers are acquiring skills and understanding that will stand them in good stead when they do, eventually, become parents.

Globally, UNESCO reports that there have been increasing attempts to help prepare parents for their role as the first educators of their children. This is recognised in many countries as an excellent strategy in helping to reinforce parents' confidence, to increase their knowledge of child development and to improve their child rearing practices.[4]

In rural Appalachia, in the USA, the Maternal and Infant Health Outreach Worker (MIHOW) programme (see page 16) has enlisted grassroots service or advocacy organisations, clinics or child care centres to recruit local women to act as advocates and educators. After training, they then recruit and supervise local mothers to act as natural helpers. These women visit low-income, high-risk pregnant women at home, before and after childbirth, helping them use available services and improve their parenting skills.



'A child's experiences in the first months and years of life determine whether he or she will enter school eager to learn or not. By school age, family and caregivers have already prepared the child for success or failure. The community has already helped or hindered the family's capacity to nurture the child's development.'
Dr T Barry Brazelton, Children's Hospital Medical Center, Boston, USA.
Heart Start, Arlington, VA, Zero to Three, National Center for Clinical Infant Programs, 1992

In three European countries home visiting programmes have been developed that aim to support and empower parents. In the UK, where the concept was first attempted, public health nurses (health visitors) who regularly called on mothers with a newborn child were given extra training to help them focus on child development issues and to enable them to encourage parents to become aware of their own potential for self-help. In Ireland, the idea was modified, and experienced mothers were recruited and trained to do home visits. These 'community

Targetting tomorrow's parents

A programme in Jamaica that supports teenage mothers and their children attempted to involve the fathers of the children, initially with little success. Project leader Joyce Jarrett says that 'Experience has shown that the bottom line to the problem is ignorance. Men perceive sperm production as constituting their only role. They have never been given basic information on what a father's responsibilities are. Child rearing practices have mirrored this lack of information; there is as yet no clear cut path for bringing up today's boys.' Eventually, the programme tried a different approach and now runs courses for adolescent boys and girls in secondary schools which comprise family life education, parenting skills, and personal development. Early results indicate a dramatic reduction in pregnancies among teenage schoolgirls.

On another Caribbean island – Trinidad – a parenting programme is part of a holistic Adolescent Development Programme (ADP). Teenagers who apply to join one of the vocational skills training courses run by SERVOL are only permitted to participate after successful completion of the ADP. The parenting

mothers', like the natural helpers in Appalachia, have been warmly welcomed by the parents being visited.[13] And the idea has continued to spread: in The Netherlands, mothers have been trained as voluntary home visitors to first-time mothers and their children.

Home visiting is also one element being used to encourage language development and cultural awareness among families in New Zealand who originate from the Pacific Islands (see page 18). A key aspect of this approach is the extensive interaction between children and parents or other family members.

The essential element that characterises these examples from the USA, Europe and New Zealand is that parents are being visited by their peers. Women from the same community, with similar backgrounds and experiences, are sharing what they know in an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. The importance of this peer-to-peer support and interaction cannot be over-emphasised in that it mimics traditional methods of passing on knowledge: methods that are rapidly disappearing in today's world. When such interactions are part of a well-planned programme that includes training, support, supervision and relevant materials, they can achieve benefits for all concerned that are not

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possible through bureaucratically organised welfare services.

Peer-to-peer interactions can benefit all parents. They are especially useful in reaching the isolated, alienated, insecure or passive parent: the young mother at home alone with a new baby; the harassed parent coping with difficulty with a number of small children born in quick succession; the parent of the handicapped child; the recent immigrant unfamiliar with the demands of the new society; the disadvantaged family overwhelmed by a multitude of problems; and those in whom fatalistic acceptance of their lot has dulled the very perception of their own needs and capabilities.[14]

The involvement of parents in facilities for their children outside the home is also a critical factor in their success. In Sweden, the National Board of Health and Welfare – which is responsible for all day care services in the public sector – says that a prerequisite of good quality day care is the need for close relationships between parents and the day care facility. It says that there needs to be a sense of trust between the parents and the day care providers and that the parents need to feel that they are involved in and are able to influence the activities of the day care centre.[15]

programme includes basic hygiene and biology, reproduction, and child development. The groups are mixed and one aim is to show boys that they are responsible in sexual relationships; that the issues under discussion are not matters which concern only women. Marilyn Stollmeyer, who teaches the parenting programme, explains that the adolecents work with young children: 'We take a six month old and a two year old and the trainees amuse them – the competition is to see who can stimulate the children most. We want them to understand how much responsibility you have with a baby. We try to deter them from teenage births and hope they realise that when the time comes to have children there is so much to look forward to.'

Such programmes are not confined to the Caribbean. In the Netherlands, links are forged between secondary schools and day care centres: the experiences of the adolescents in the centres are reinforced by classes in school. In New York City, which has a high rate of teenage pregnancy, special curricula have been developed for use in high schools.

Sources Targetting tomorrow's parents: Jarrett, J. 'Jamaica: young men are becoming responsible fathers' in **Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter,** No. 65, Jan. 1992, p. 4. and Cohen, R. **Shaping tomorrow,** the Servol programmes in Trinidad and Tobago The Hague, Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1991

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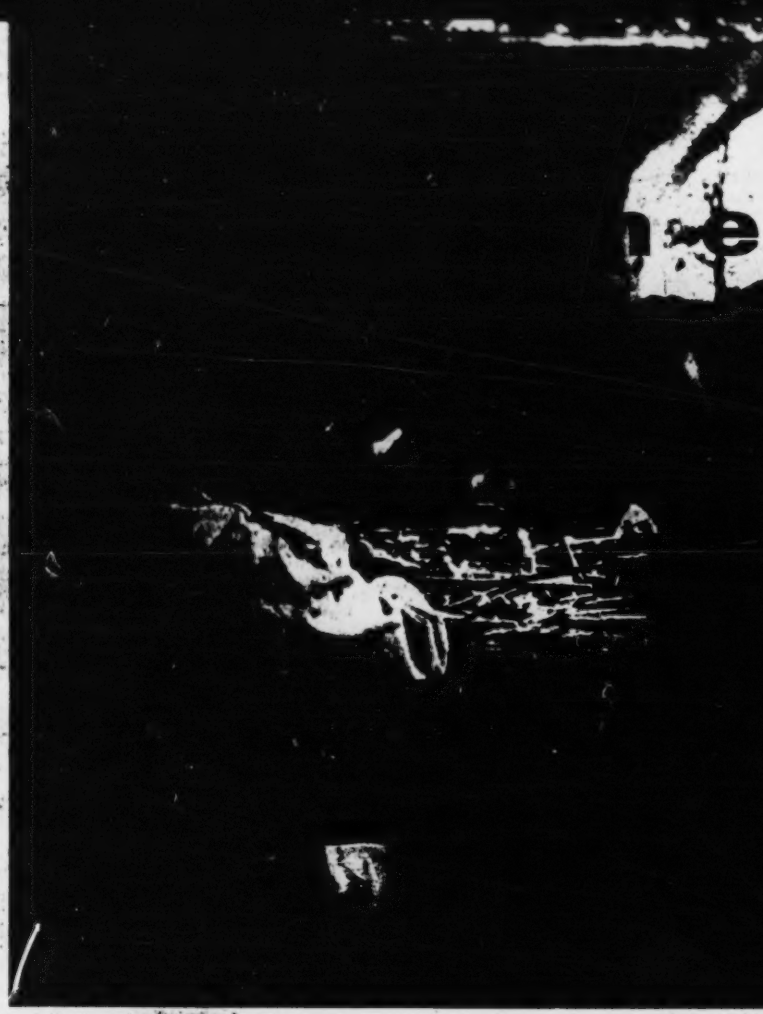
Involve

USA: identifying talent *The States that comprise the rural mountainous region of Appalachia have the highest infant mortality rates in the USA. A programme run from the Center for Health Services of Vanderbilt University recruits and trains local women to be 'natural helpers'. They undertake home visits to pregnant women and mothers of infants, run groups for mothers and toddlers, coordinate services, and encourage community initiatives.*

These natural helpers, known as MIHOWs (Maternal and Infant Health Outreach Workers) serve as living examples to the mothers they visit of people who have survived many similar circumstances and obstacles. As peers, they have a foundation on which to build mutual trust. As survivors of similar problems, they tend to respect each other's efforts to cope. The MIHOW visitors stress the importance of adopting a positive attitude and encouraging the mothers to feel good about themselves.

Mothers find the MIHOWs a major source of support. The way the workers present information contributes to their reception in the



Communities form part of the larger environment that the child grows into, influencing developmental outcomes. Bronfenbrenner[18] has illustrated the role of communities by identifying inter-related subsystems. The micro-system is the closest to the child during the early years, and is best represented by the home and the role of parents. As children grow older, they begin to interact more with other adults and to socialise with their peers and they enter the meso-system, formed by the child's neighbourhood, the day care centre, the school. The exo-system is formed by broader institutions and social organisations in which the child does not participate directly, such as the church, the government, the mass media, and the macro-system which organises and gives a sense of direction to all previous three sub-systems. The best example of a macro-system is the ideology under which a given culture grounds its own identity.

The increasingly complex world of interactions is important to children's development. Wherever possible, the complex set of relationships that affect a child's development should be encouraged, maintained and strengthened. Research in the USA confirms that an important protective factor in the lives of children who were able to do well socially, emotionally and educationally despite living in conditions of disadvantage was their involvement in social networks that offered them support. In particular, interaction with adults who were not family members was

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community and to the impact of the messages. Because the workers only offer advice rather than instruction, the mothers tend to accept the advice. The workers are generally seen as people who really care. One woman says that some of the social workers who came to see her and her baby did so because they were required by law to do so, but that the MIHOW workers 'act like they want to do it, not like they have to'.

The programme is having impact. Infant mortality has dropped in the programme area. Many mothers talk about increased self-esteem, setting different goals for themselves and their children and taking important steps towards reaching those goals. Their children's health and development has improved.

By encouraging a child development service that relies on local talent and is relatively inexpensive, the MIHOW programme hopes to assure a long life for the intervention.

found to be significant.[17] Thus community members and community institutions can play a vital role in helping children develop by contributing to a better learning environment. At the same time, the community itself may benefit.

In Portugal, the entire community in some rural areas is being encouraged to take part in children's development and learning (see page 20). This approach has changed the ways in which children perceive learning and schools: learning is something which goes on all around them, and schools are places where some of this learning takes place. Because so many learning activities are public and visible, and because communities are closely involved, children who have yet to move into formal education have plenty of opportunities to participate.

Source USA: identifying talent:
in Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter,
No. 64, Oct. 1991, pp.6-7

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Language nests in New Zealand *Some three per cent of the population of New Zealand are people from the Pacific Island nations of Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga, the Tokelau Islands and Fiji. A project – Anau Ako Pasifika (Family education in the Pacific way) – works to counter problems of isolation and cultural conflict by encouraging families to pass on their own language and traditions to young children.*

One strategy used is that of 'language nests' which bring together infants, toddlers and young children up to five years of age with mothers, aunts, grandmothers and anyone else from the community who is interested in helping out. The children absorb their mother tongue through play, by repeating rhythmic sounds, by singing songs and by hearing and participating in normal conversation. Another strategy is a home visiting component that reinforces the activities in the language nest. Mothers are helped to find ways to interact with their children in both the mother tongue and English. The director of the programme, Poko Morgan, a Cook Islander,

In Kenya, [illegible]'s groups, supported by the [illegible] Housing Fund, have discussed and planned an impressive set of integrated programmes to enhance early childhood care and development. These include creches for infants, day care centres for children from 3 to 7 years, mothers' education programmes, homework help programmes for older children [illegible] areas, a street children's rehabilitation programme [illegible] pool preparatory programme for 10-12 year olds who have missed out on schooling. A parallel [illegible] programme has a similar [illegible] components. All the activities are being run by elected committees of the groups are building [illegible] proceeds from the income-generating activities the women operate, supplemented with subsidised loans from the housing fund.

In Northern Ireland, a community facility, the 123 House, has been able to develop [illegible] with [illegible] and [illegible] a playgroup for [illegible] olds. As well as [illegible] the parents and playgroup [illegible] the development [illegible] the playgroup is also being used to spot difficulties [illegible] and [illegible] something can be done about [illegible] an early stage. Social workers and other professionals are [illegible] working with the 123 House because it offers a holistic approach. It is concerned with the [illegible] child, [illegible] background and [illegible]

One approach to [illegible] involvement is to recruit [illegible] childhood [illegible] community. A study [illegible] working [illegible] among the Arab [illegible] Jerusalem found that the employment of indigenous [illegible] reinforces the community's [illegible] itself as able to improve [illegible] situation. (see page 22)

Community leaders, women's organisations, social [illegible] providers, health workers, co-operatives, local officials, schools and teachers, businesses, universities can all play a part in early childhood care and development. They reflect what Ruth Paz describes [illegible] and their [illegible] for themselves, [illegible] a chance; a regard for [illegible] of what is right for [illegible] respect for their ri[illegible] own choices, faith [illegible] of people joining with others to find solutions to their shared problems – faith in the power of comm[illegible]

'Play is an indispensable activity in the child's development.'
Rachel Camegie and Hugh Hawes, Child-to-Child Trust
Child-to-child and the Growth and Development of Young Children, London, Child-to-Child Trust, 1990, p. 12

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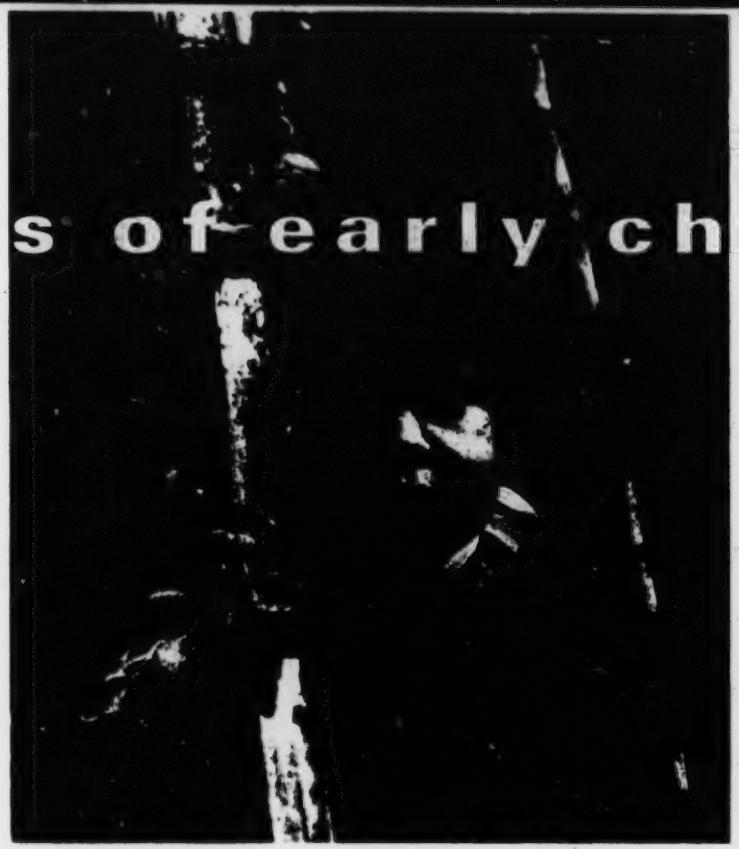
Source Language nests in New Zealand:
'New Zealand: the silence can be frightening'
rnard van Leer Foundation Newsletter,
Jan. 1989. pp. 8-10

says, 'the need to facilitate the development of a child's verbal skills in the home begins when the mother holds her in her arms, talks and coos to her, and sings, chants and tells stories. Little children need to be surrounded by language.'

'It has been incontestable for decades that ... chances of success at the primary level can be substantially improved through the implementation of pre-school programmes .... It is also probable that investment at this level will produce the highest pay-off.'
Jacques Hallak, Director, International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO. Investing in the Future: Setting educational priorities in the developing world, Paris, UNESCO, 1990.

Benefits of early chi



Portugal: learning is everywhere *Schools in rural areas of Portugal tend to be small and have few resources. In an attempt to combat high dropout and failure rates, Escolas Isoladas (the Isolated Schools project) encourages communities to collaborate in the education of children. Any and all local facilities are available for learning, irrespective of whether they are officially educational or not. This can mean that lessons are held in homes, fields, barns, and similar unlikely locations; and that grandparents, farmers, local business people and other community members may act as educators, or as important sources of information.*

Sometimes a number of schools and communities get together to organise 'A different day'. This includes a full programme of educational events, sports and recreational activities. Equipment is made by children, teachers and local people working together. Later a community picnic is held, with the food made by the children under instruction from mothers and grandmothers, and drinks donated by local

Source Portugal: learning is everywhere:
'Smoothing the way in Portugal'
in Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter,
No. 70, April 1993, pp.10-11

Researchers have mainly focused on long-term outcomes as the justification for intervention in the early years. In the 1960s for example, school performance was usually assessed in relation to IQ scores.[19] So far, there is little evidence that early intervention has a sustainable impact on children's IQ rates. Recent research indicates that it is in the areas of personality development and motivation (self esteem) that more permanent long term effects can be found. These are reflected in outcomes such as less expenditure on special education, less drug addiction, lower delinquency rates, higher incomes, less use of welfare services.[20]

But children should be considered in their own right. This means being concerned with their overall development: thus short term outcomes are as important as long-term outcomes. While ECCD interventions may lay the foundation for later success in school, it is important that they also offer a comprehensive approach to children's development. They need to address not only children's cognitive development, but also their social behaviours and values,[21] and their health and nutrition.[22] The beneficial effect on school performance is the easiest to measure, but it is only one outcome. Better social skills, greater competence, and a tendency to interact more with others all lead to attitudes and behaviours that will make an important contribution to society in later life. Where health and nutritional status are also monitored and improved, the benefits will manifest in terms of a healthier population, better able to work productively and less likely to be a regular drain on the resources of the health care or state welfare systems.

Children's progress in school is commonly used as an indicator of

Idhood interventions

how they will get on in society. Yet large numbers of children who enter primary school do not stay long enough to acquire literacy and other basic skills. In developing countries, about one in every three children drop out before completing the fourth grade of primary school.[23] The consequences for society as a whole of school repetition and dropout is a population that is poorly educated and that is more likely to have difficulty finding adequate employment. As a result, people will lack the resources to maintain proper nutrition and health, and the intergenerational perpetuation of failure and poverty will take root.

This particularly affects girls who often have fewer opportunities when it comes to education. This is one of the most costly mistakes that any society can make. The World Bank points out that investing in education, especially for girls, is one of the best long-term strategies to improve people's health. Studies have found that, because mothers play a dominant role in the care of young children, each additional year of maternal schooling contributes to an average seven to nine per cent decline in infant mortality. Educated mothers adopt better household management and child care practices which improve children's health and development, improvements that persist through time and in different socio-economic settings.[24]

Increasingly too, evidence is emerging in many settings to show that investing in early childhood interventions can have a positive benefit on children's school performance and

farmers. Bicycles, horse-drawn carts and vans are willingly lent to solve the inevitable transport problems. Preparations for such a day occupy many people in a great deal of work, and the day itself involves everyone from the very youngest to the most elderly. And it is all in the name of education.

Israel: the community as partner in its own social progress *The East Jerusalem project has been running early childhood and community programmes among the Arab population of the Old City since 1979. These include centre-based and home-based activities aimed at infants and young children and their mothers, older siblings, fathers and grandparents. The project developed its own training programme for women from the community who then worked as para-professionals in all of the project's activities. Mohammed Hai-Yahia, in a study of para-professionals, examined the rationale behind the training and employment of indigenous para-professionals. He made the following points:*

"Recruitment and training of women from the target population as para-professional workers transfers them from one side of the societal fence to the other, from being passive and dependent recipients of assistance, who have internalised society's negative view of them, to active members of the community able to give to others, and consequently, able to take pride in

[redacted] the UK, the Education Select Committee made the point that pre-school programmes can bring about beneficial [redacted]. It argued that such programmes can enrich a child's life both at the time the child is involved, and also have a longer term impact, particularly in later education. The Head Start and High/Scope programmes in the USA have produced considerable documentation of long-term impact including children being in the right grade at the right age, staying in school longer, and being more likely to find employment upon leaving school.[28] Long-term follow up of participants in a pre-school programme in Ireland found that the negative effects of disadvantage could be partially offset and could produce significant educational benefits for some children. [redacted] child development in Malaysia found that pre-school [redacted] helped disadvantaged children to gain cognitive, language and socio-emotional skills. Similar results have come from programmes in Brazil, Colombia, Haiti, India and Thailand.[29]

These interventions did not seek to increase children's IQ scores, they

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were holistic programmes th... addressed children as part of ... environments. The results ... seen in terms of well-adjus... beings who are self-confi... motivated to learn and ... participants in ... Colombia, for ... childhood programme ... fishing village that be... seeing the results ... the first children to ... school are reaching the ... their school career. More ch...ren are completing primary and secondary school than ever before, the children are articulate and care about improving their community, and the local community action committee has taken over the activities originally initiated by the University-run programme (see page 24).

The benefits of ECCD programmes ... confined only to children ... are involved report that ... confidence ... own education or ... develop a new creative or social ... community participation ... can also lead to an empowering ... process, finding a way ... with ... the needs of a community ... children makes it easier ... that change in other are... health, sanitation, em... employment opportunities ... recreation facilities is ... Community-based child de... programmes can be a sprin... community development.

Source Israel: the comm... in its own social progress: Haj-Yahia, M. A dec... about the para-professionals in the project. Jer... nity and Early Childhood Education project, ... ity Centre, March 1984

'I didn't know that there was so much that you could learn before primary school.'
Parent in Trinidad. Quoted in Cohen, R. Shaping Tomorrow. The Hague, Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1991, p. 55

themselves. The feeling of 'I don't have enough strength to give of myself' is replaced by that of 'I'm capable, I can give to others'.

** Generally, professional workers belong to the stronger class of society and their clients to the weaker. Employment of women from a similar socio-cultural and demographic background bridges this gap, provides a role model for the more passive and apathetic, and initiates a process of change in self-image and self-identity.*

** Indigenous workers who share the life-style, values, traditions and mentality of their 'clients' can often understand the latter's problems and build a relationship of empathy and trust. This in turn enables them to assume the role of 'significant other' within the community rather than outside it.*

** Employing indigenous workers casts the community in the role of partner in its own social progress; it reinforces the community's perception of itself as able to improve its own situation.*

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[Q]uality and

Colombia: a process of change *In the Costa Atlantica region of Colombia a private university – Universidad del Norte – initiated an early childhood programme in the small and impoverished fishing village of La Playa in 1977. Starting from an existing but under-used pre-school, a wide range of early childhood and community activities were set in motion. In 1989, Andrew Chetley spoke to members of the community.*

Talking with some of the children from the first group to leave the pre-school in 1978, it became evident that they think the programme has had an impact. They described one of the changes they had experienced as learning how to communicate better. Their willingness to talk about their school activities, events in the life of the community, and the ease with which they were able to articulate ideas to improve community life and build their own future plans was a clear indication that they had learned to think about the society in which they lived and had learned to care about improving it. And because they had been through the process, when the younger children come home, their older

A key determinant of how beneficial an early childhood programme can be, is its quality. Research from five countries underscores the importance of the quality of child care as a mediating factor affecting child development, whether the care is provided inside or outside the home.

Quality does not necessarily mean expensive interventions. Quality of care has to be defined in terms of experiences which foster children's development and well-being. Research on child development has identified some of those factors: adult-child interaction, peer interaction, interpersonal relationships, activities fostering learning and development, healthy and safe conditions and emotional climate or happiness.[31]

Research from Sweden highlights the quality of care in the home as the most influential determinant of children's development.[32] Research from France indicates that young children are 'very sensitive to the quality of the environment' around them. The more stimulated children were by a 'positively oriented caretaker, the more interest they show in people and things in the outside world and the more vivid their reactions, in emotional terms, to daily events. In contrast, children who received little stimulation with little affection from the caregiver tended to be quieter and this passivity was accompanied with slower social and psycho-motor development.[33]

'The communities, the children, the mothers, the families, together we have created a new way of thinking, a new way of living and of resolving our problems, problems that are of very great urgency. Problems that can wait no longer.'
José Amar Amar, psychologist, Universidad del Norte, Colombia
Comment made in a documentary made for British television, The Power to Change, about an innovative approach to providing pre-school care and encouraging community development.

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Source: Columbia: a process of change
Chetley, A. The Power to Change.
The experience of the Costa Atlántica project in Colombia (1977-1989).
The Hague, Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1990

siblings can help them in creative play and keep the developmental process going at home. The fact that more and more children are going on to complete primary and secondary school is itself an indicator of the change occurring in La Playa.

The president of the Communal Action Committee said that there was a great civic spirit: 'The project was the seed and the community continued to nurture the development of that seed. And the community is now in charge of that which was planted by the project'. For example, between 1977 and 1980 over 850 people attended courses arranged by the Committee in topics as varied as first aid, nutrition, family relations, sex education, carpentry, dress making, kitchen gardening, shoe making, plumbing, child psychology, and family rights.

Available longitudinal studies[14] claim that pre-schools, when they are of high quality, have a significant effect on children compared to those who did not attend pre-school. However, merely providing pre-schools, let alone assuring 'high quality', is expensive and beyond the reach of most developing countries and disadvantaged communities. The Bernard van Leer Foundation does not see pre-schools as the only approach to early childhood programmes because we believe that communities must be involved in the development of their youngest members. we encourage and support approaches that enhance active community participation.

This implies training local people as para-professionals, working with families to support and improve the quality of their interactions with children, and involving community organisations in the improvement of the local environment in order to ensure appropriate settings for the overall healthy development of their young children.

The Foundation believes that the involvement of parents and communities enhances young children's development, as well as helping to compensate for the lack of resources from governments and other external agencies. By working together in partnership, governments and local communities can ensure that minimal standards of quality are achieved.

Balancing the need for quality with the need for affordability is a difficult equation. Assessing how much an ECCD programme costs is not a simple task due to its multiple effects and multiple beneficiaries. The question of who pays and how much is a reasonable price to pay is often at the root of all policy debates about ECCD programmes. In India (see page 26), for example, finding an equitable way of dividing the costs among all the beneficiaries is a major concern for organisations advocating for more and better child care.

Cost effectiveness studies rarely show unequivocally that one social programme is more efficient than another.[15] What is being seen as an effective option is the combining of a number of elements that affect development: health, nutrition, child development, education, sanitation,

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India: putting early childhood on the national agenda *In India, there are 56 million children under six years of age whose mothers have to work for sheer survival. Many of the children go to workplaces with their mothers, on construction sites, quarries, mines – not the best places for children. The Centre for Womens Development Studies in New Delhi is coordinating a network of 50 organisations called FORCES for Children. FORCES – the Forum for Creche and Child Care Services – is about advocacy and campaigning, not service provision. Its aim is to put child care and early education on the national agenda. Because child care is not seen as a major issue in the country, FORCES has launched a national campaign about the importance of having good quality child care available. This is reinforced by state level activities and the aim is to reach policy makers at all levels.*

Discussions with the Ministry of Labour and Department of Women and Child Development have looked at ways of rationalising the kinds of day care that can be available, such as having a

income generation, environmental improvements. Adding a child development component to an existing community development programme will result in lower costs and greater impact than simply having such a component operating in isolation.

Health and nutrition programmes that are aimed at both young children and women are natural partners for ECCD programmes. Ideally, they should be part of one programme so that all workers can advise on health, nutritional and developmental aspects of young children and so that efforts in these areas will be fully coordinated. There are programmes where pregnant mothers and children meet at health clinics, and there are others where health staff visit ECCD centres to immunise, measure and check all the young children in the community as well as advise and run health education sessions for parents. Such integrated programmes provide better services for children and families and ensure full and economic use of available resources.

Where an ECCD programme includes health and nutrition components, the children will gain through their enhanced capacities and so will society. Where the programme can affect the overall environment – in terms of water, sanitation and general hygienic conditions – the whole community will benefit. And if economic conditions can also be addressed, for example, by the introduction of income-generating

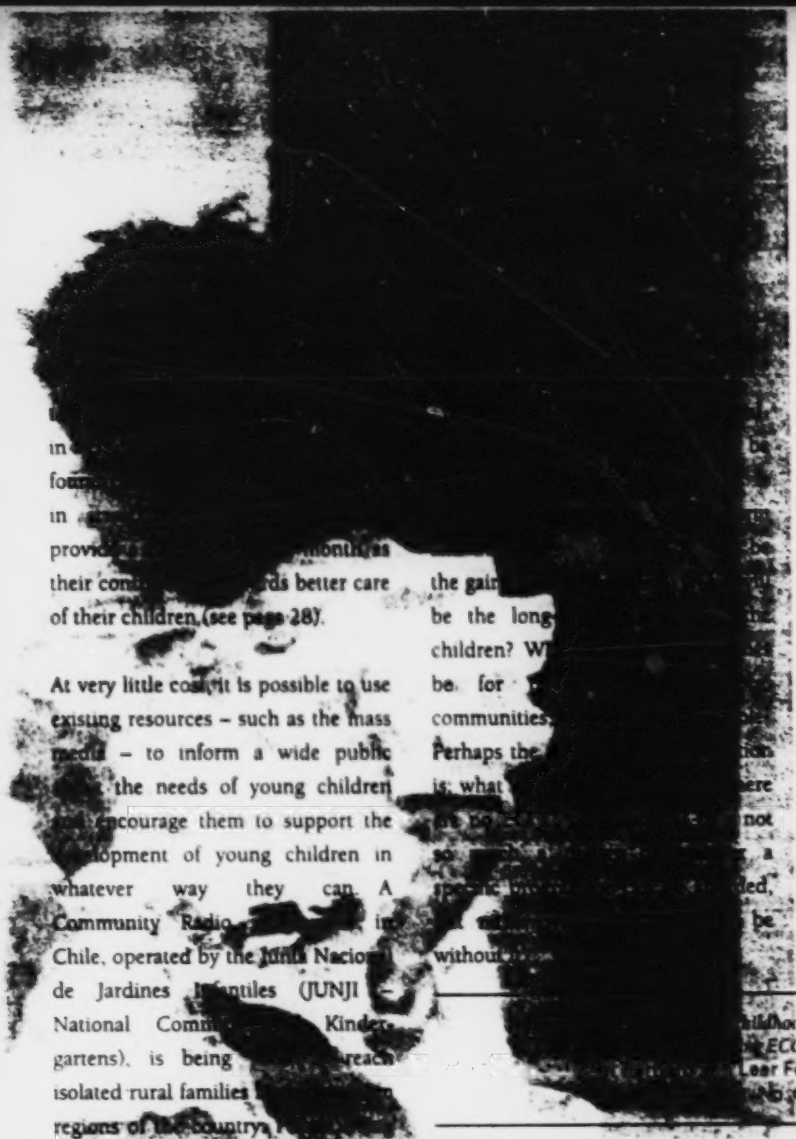
all rise in living be considerable Because such over the entire involved, they extremely difficult to measure in purely financial terms. demonstrates that spent at the outset may eventually result in many more dollars saved or earned in later years (see page 27).

Just as it is impossible to calculate accurately all the effects and benefits of ECCD programmes, so it is difficult to assess all the costs. Cost calculations frequently omit many aspects: perhaps only the cost to the national government is given, or only the costs of the international donor.

Many of the resources used in ECCD programmes never appear in any budget, for example the time and materials that are donated by members of local communities. Although these need to be taken into account when assessing available resources, not to overburden families and communities that are already disadvantaged and under great pressure and strains in their daily struggles to survive.

To 'lower' costs, some programmes charge fees to parents. But this 'lowering' of costs applies only to the other participants (usually public authorities). A problem with charging fees is that this may exclude the most disadvantaged children because their parents cannot afford to pay. However, many programmes believe

community-based or neighbourhood creche in an industrial zone rather than just leaving it to one particular workplace or employer. This has led to a recognition that enabling legislation to set quality standards is essential. Discussion has also focused on who is going to pay for improved child care services. Should there be a levy or tax on employers, will the workers pay a small amount, or is it going to be entirely funded by the state?



of their children. (see page 28).

At very little cost, it is possible to use existing resources – such as the mass media – to inform a wide public about the needs of young children and encourage them to support the development of young children in whatever way they can. A Community Radio [illegible] in Chile, operated by the Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles (JUNJI – National Committee for Kindergartens), is being [illegible] to reach isolated rural families [illegible] regions of the country. [illegible] them are confronted daily with problems [illegible] isolation [illegible] of [illegible] are low [illegible] rights [illegible] good practice [illegible] natal care among [illegible] also offers information [illegible] and activities to help with the emotional and cognitive problems experienced by children aged 2 to 7. JUNJI invites parents to contribute their experiences to the programme and also encourages them to set up groups to run home-based activities. In Thailand, a theatre group has developed an innovative approach to reaching disadvantaged families with basic health and development

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[illegible]ear Foundation Newsletter.
[illegible]68, Oct. 1992, pp.19-20

Expenditure choices In the USA, the Children's Defense Fund contrasts the [illegible] investment in early childhood [illegible] medial [illegible] cal figures will diff[illegible] not change, m[illegible]

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$1 for [illegible] OR

[illegible] OR

Source: [illegible]
Washington D[illegible]

Multiple choices: deve

El Salvador: helping mothers and children *By seven in the morning, the market of Soyapango – a densely populated area to the east of the country's capital, San Salvador – is beginning to bustle with activity. One of those activities is a day care centre in the market that caters for the children of the many young single mothers who operate stalls selling food they have prepared or bought from a larger market earlier in the day. Before the day care centre was set up in 1990, the mothers had no choice but to keep their small children with them throughout the long day which usually does not end before five in the afternoon. The streets of the busy market are no place for children to be left to wander by themselves.*

Although the mothers earn very little, usually no more than 10 to 15 Colon per day, they each contribute one Colon a week to the centre and are involved in its work. They visit during the day, attend parents' meetings each month and have a full-day training session on child nutrition, health and development every six months. The programme has also started to

'The long-term value of pre-school experience depends not only on the quality of that experience, but on its being sustained both by those responsible for the child outside his or her pre-school group and subsequently by those who take over responsibility for his or her education.'
Joyce Watt, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Evaluation in Action: a case study of an under-fives centre in Scotland, The Hague, Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1988, p. 92

There is little choice about whether to support early childhood development. There is no question that a child's first years are the most important in the life of a human being; or that attention in the early years brings benefits for the children themselves, for their families, and for society as a whole. The choices are about approaches and strategies to enhance children's early development. The differences depend on the setting, audience, resources, and the reality of the daily life of children, families, and communities.

Acknowledging children's needs:
At least 71 million children under the age of 6 are enroled in some form of programme, according to a UNESCO survey of 88 countries.[16] In almost every country, this provision is for children between the ages of 3 and 6. UNESCO estimated that in 1988 there was a global gross pre-primary enrolment rate of just under 30 per cent. This varied from an average of about 5 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa to more than 67 per cent in Europe.[17] This means that at least two out of every three children are cared for during all their pre-school years in the home or through an informal family or neighbourhood arrangement. During the first three years, virtually all care for children is provided by parents and family.

Making adequate choices:
In virtually every country, there is no single solution, no national programme that can be applied everywhere. Children's developmental needs vary as they grow; the places where those

oping an agenda for action

needs can be met also change over time. Planners may need to look for a combination of approaches that satisfy the varying needs of children, their parents and the communities in which they live.

Strategies that are most likely to be effective are those that build on what already exists; that involve parents and communities and enable them to take responsibility for their own futures and that of their children; that are rooted in local culture and traditions; that understand the central role of women and support them in their many tasks; that recognise the need for a holistic approach; and that ensure appropriate settings for the overall healthy development of young children.

There are many approaches that can be used: working directly with parents and caregivers; training peers as para-professional workers; targetting older children and adolescents; using the community as a place of learning; assisting the development of community groups; using media such as radio or street theatre to transmit information and for advocacy; ensuring there are adequate and effective means of training, supporting and supervising ECCD workers; developing effective materials; enlisting local and national groups of business people and professionals to support ECCD.

A variety of types of day care and child care facilities are possible based in the home, linked to health centres or primary schools, part of a community centre, or purpose-built pre-schools. But support for parents and caregivers does not have to be through centres: home visiting and parent education programmes can be equally effective.

Developing policy for children's welfare

Training, legislation and economic incentives for employers are some of the supportive measures that can be used to ensure that programmes are carried out, that standards are high and that costs are spread among all the beneficiaries.

ECCD interventions do not necessarily have to be expensive: quality is about the relationships the children have with their caregivers and the surrounding environment. The question is affordability in the local context and looking for ways of combining approaches to make the most effective use of resources, both human and financial.

Above all, child development is both a parental and a social responsibility. The basic values and culture that are transmitted to young children reflect the family and the community into which they are born. Listening to what family and community members want is the first step in helping them to play a major role in finding acceptable and affordable solutions.

provide training in business management and financial administration for the mothers.

The children are cared for by educadores, women who have completed school and who undergo a continuous staff development programme to help them work with the children and their families. The success of the initial centre has led to similar centres being established in other markets.

Source El Salvador: helping mothers and children:
'El Salvador: children in markets'
in Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter,
No. 64, Oct. 1991, p. 16

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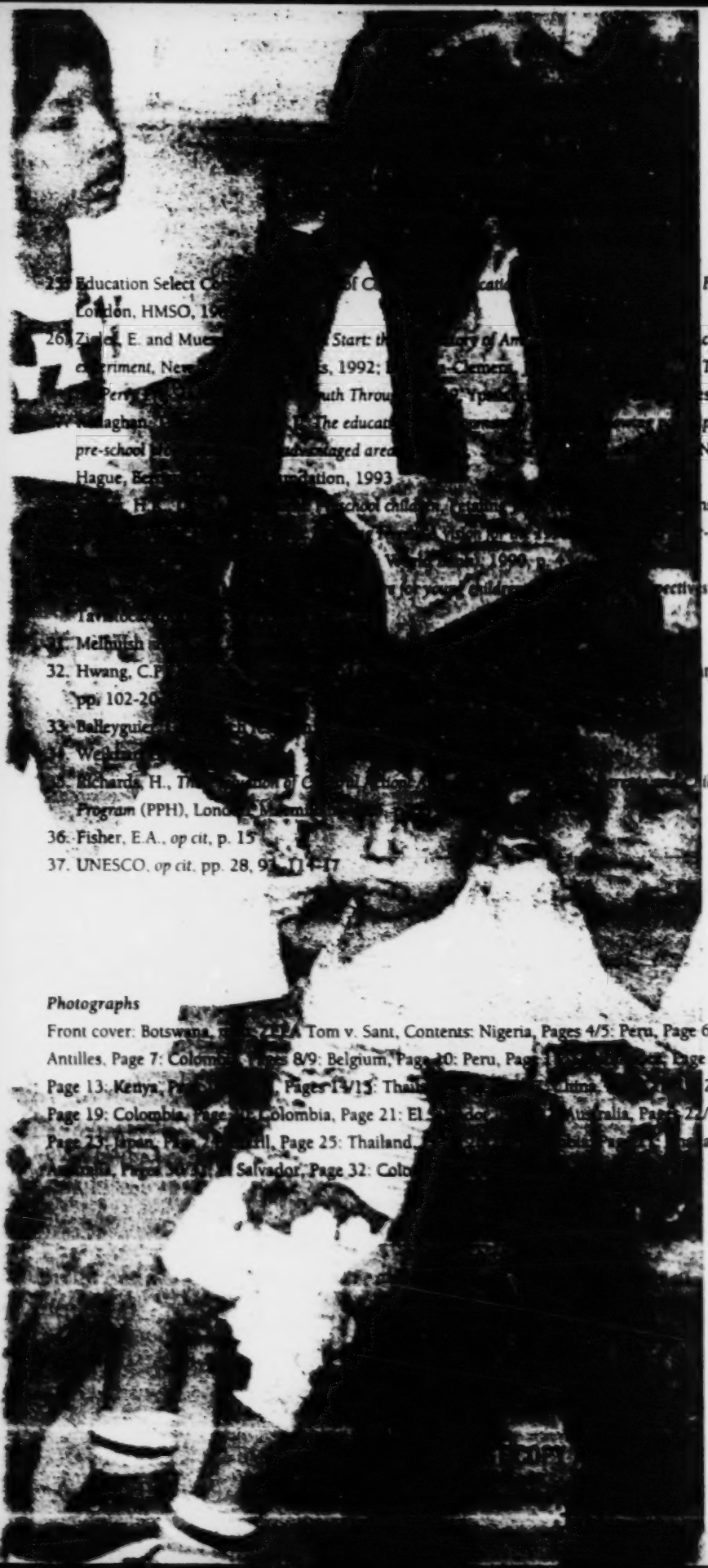

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Photographs

Front cover: Botswana, … A Tom v. Sant, Contents: Nigeria, Pages 4/5: Peru, Page 6: Netherlands Antilles, Page 7: Colom… …es 8/9: Belgium, Page 10: Peru, Page … …e 12: Brazil, Page 13: Kenya, Pa… …, Pages 14/15: Thail… …, Zimbabwe, Page 19: Colombia, Page … Colombia, Page 21: El … …Australia, Page 22/23: Thailand, Page 23: Japan, Page … …il, Page 25: Thailand, … …and, Page 28: … Salvador, Page 32: Colo…

Thailand: learning is made fun *In the evening darkness the voices of scores of excited children fall to a hush. The curtain opens slowly to reveal a woman being plagued by a swarm of huge flies. As the woman angrily shouts and swipes at the flies, the children shriek with laughter, delighted at her antics. Behind this comedy is a serious message about hygiene and preventable disease. The children are learning, and learning is made fun. This is a simple makeshift puppet theatre, and the performance is held in an empty space, outdoors, in a Bangkok slum. The audience is drawn from the children and parents from the surrounding area. The theatre group is called Mava, which means 'illusion' in Thai. The main aim of the group is to bring about social development through art, drama and other forms of expression. In 1989, Mava started the 'theatre-in-education' campaign in the Bangkok slums performing in over 50 schools. Each year, it has been able to add more schools and complements its work with training workshops for the teachers. The team also tours remote rural areas of Thailand where access to public services is limited. For this, it uses a mobile theatre kit containing a minimum of props. Kits are also available to teachers and social workers interested in teaching through the arts. The performances convey information about social development, education, environmental issues, child care and development, communications and health.*

Source: Thailand: learning is made fun.
Mava: the Art and Cultural Institute for Development
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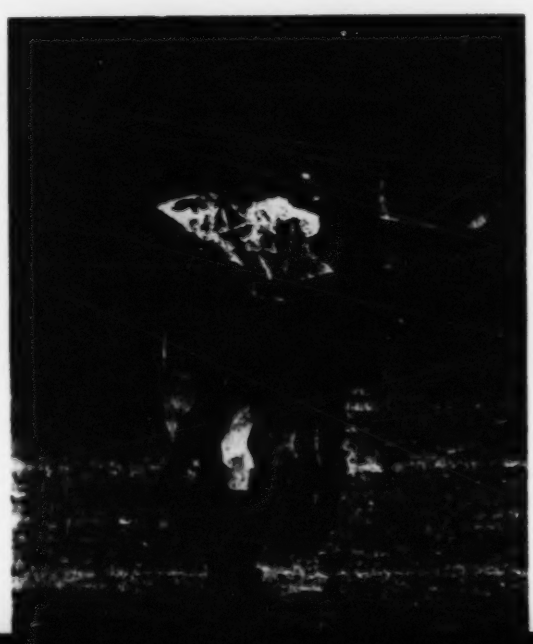

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